Pauline A. Roberts

The Scarlet Letter . . .

DRAMATIC POEM

- BY -

GEORGE PARSONS LATHROP

OPERA BY WALTER DAMROSCH

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GEORGE PARSONS LATHROP

MUSIC BY

WALTER DAMROSCH

Persons Represented.

ARTHUR, - - - - - - - ___

HESTER, - - - - - - - ___

CHILLINGWORTH, - - - - - - ___

WILSON, - - - - - - - ___

BELLINGHAM, - - - - - - ___

BRACKETT, - - - - - - - ___

A SHIPMASTER, - - - - - - ___

Introductory Note.

When Mr. Walter Damrosch asked me to write a Dramatic Poem suited for the music of a Grand Opera, on the theme of Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter," two important artistic requirements had to be taken into view: First, it was necessary to make the movement of the piece quick and eminently dramatic. Secondly, the lines must be not only *singable* in rhythm and in succession of vowel sounds, but must have a quality that would promote or coöperate with a rich and impassioned musical expression.

It is but fair to say that the dramatic construction was the result of collaboration by the composer and the author, and was largely suggested by Mr. Damrosch. Obviously the character of Little Pearl was impossible in opera, and she was therefore omitted. The great elemental story of Hester's and Arthur's love, sin, suffering and partial expiation is what we wished to treat. This is presented with the utmost directness and compression. Gaps are bridged, delays avoided. Incidents are changed, remodelled or transposed at will, and new incidents and moods are introduced.

No attempt has been made to reproduce or to follow exactly the great prose romance from which the story is drawn. I do not suppose, either, that I have adapted from Hawthorne's pages more than two dozen sentences, if so many, in the whole work. My text is an original Dramatic Poem on the old theme.

It stands, therefore, as a new work, which may be read for itself. But it is also designed, in every line, for music and song. I used an entire freedom in the form and the varying measures employed. To write verse suited to musical conceptions, and to interpretation by the orchestra and voice, however, is almost a distinctive branch of the poetic art. The poem must have abrupt changes of time and character, not always conforming to the traditions of verse meant only for reading, but obeying a large artistic law. In this poem of

"The Scarlet Letter" a greater variety of feet, measures and stanzas is brought into play. The form was moulded by the sentiment, passion or situation at each moment.

Besides the metre and rhythm of each line, regarded separately, there is often a complicated word melody, or a scheme of emphases and pauses, running through several lines. These three, as a simple instance, while having each its own "time," belong to one continuous rhythm, and must be taken together to complete it :

"For thee I would rule
By thy shattered heart
And truth forsworn."

Such "over-rhythms," as they might be called, correspond frequently to continuing strains in the music. It will be seen, then, that rhyme is in many places not essential. Although I have used it freely, I drop it the instant it might interfere with finer effects. In other places, where there may be an appearance of partial rhyme, rhyme has not been sought for, but only that kinship of vowel-sounds called assonance. It may be well to add that certain faltering effects, or irregularities, are intentional, where regularity or smooth and rounded verse forms would have failed to convey the mood or emotion needing to be expressed.

GEORGE PARSONS LATHROP.

January, 1895.

Pamelia A. Roberts

THE SCARLET LETTER.

ACT I.

The Market-Place, Boston, with Prison at L., a rosebush in bloom growing by the door. At back, a Church or Meeting-House. At R., the Town Hall, and near it the Pillory, R. C. Openings on either side of the Meeting-House, giving a view of Boston Harbor.

Puritan men and women, entering through these streets and at sides, assemble in excitement.

MASTER BRACKETT, *the Jailer, with a company of Soldiers, stands near the Prison door.*

CHORUS OF PURITAN MEN AND WOMEN.

Chorus. How boldly shines the sun!
Yet outer darkness
Enfolds yon wicked woman: while, within her,
The wrong that she hath done
Gleams bold as bale-fire 'gainst the light of day.
O child of error, fair,
Caught in her beauty's own unhallowed snare;—
How boldly shines the sun
To flare upon her shame!
But she, with soul that burns in angry flame,
Stays close in her prison.
There, there she lurks—the sinner,
Hiding herself away.
Quick! Bring her forth.

Brackett. Who dares here command?
The Governor cometh:
He only hath power to condemn.
Wait justice, then, at his hand.

[*Pushing aside the people.*

Aside, there, stand;—
Aside, I say!
You bluster like the wind,
For your will is the wind's rough way.

Chorus. The woman hath foully sinned,
Yet vengeance slumbers.
To our folk she must expiate
The shame she hath bro't on them.

[*They surge towards the jail as if to attack it.*

Brackett. Be silent. Hearken!

Chorus. Hester, the sinner!
Bring forth the offender.
If she stood here before us,
For pity or pardon
To sue and implore us,
No mercy would lighten her burden;
For judgment stern we would render.
To crime give its guerdon:
Her sin is abhorrent:—
Death's doom we would award her,
Since the law gives us warrant.
To judgment! Condemn her!

[*They make another rush at the jail, but are beaten back by the soldiers.*

Brackett (*to the soldiers*). Guard the gate!

Enter CHILLINGWORTH, *unobserved.*

Chill. What wrathful sound is this that rises loud?
How fierce their anger 'gainst an erring woman!
O strange! Tho' oft I've heard the hungry storm
Roar for its prey;—sharp winds of ocean moaning;—
More dreadful is this cry of human hearts
That know not mercy.

Brackett. Behold, she comes!

Chorus. She comes!

[*The prison door opens. Crowd subsides into momentary hush. In the dark shadow of the corridor within the prison door a red glow is seen proceeding from a lantern hanging there. The soldiers form a lane through the crowd from the prison door to the pillory.*

Chorus. Hush, hush! Behold
From the prison gleams
A glowing flame.
See you not? See you not?

[*Enter from prison door a jailer, followed after a brief pause by* HESTER. *She stands for a moment on the door-step, silent, dignified, yet woe-begone.* HESTER, *accompanied by* BRACKETT, *crosses stage towards the Pillory. Some of the crowd point at the Scarlet Letter on her breast. Others turn away or shield their eyes as though horror-stricken and blinded by it.*

[CHILLINGWORTH, *roused by their cries, moves to where he can see Hester, and gazes at her, at first curiously.*

Chill. This creature—who?
Nay, what horror! 'Tis Hester—
My wife! My wife!

Chorus. Jezebel! Jezebel!
Daughter of hell!
See how serpent-like it twines,
Yon letter, with its coiling lines;
As though it were clutching her breast,
Of her soul in quest.
Lo, she sports with her shame,
And hath woven the letter
With gaudy splendor of scarlet.
The token that should be her fetter
She turns to a mocking flame
Of adornment. Down with the cursèd harlot!
Punish her evil doing;—
Banish her shadow, that darkens
Each true Puritan dwelling,
Staining us all with dishonor;

Tempting God's wrath, in disaster.
Far into hell-fire cast her.
Down with the cursèd harlot!

[BRACKETT *and the Soldiers protect* HESTER *from crowd. Reaching Pillory, she ascends it, and stands alone there, defiant.*

Chill. O blasting mockery! O bleak despair!
All mercy withers now in fires of hate;
And from my heart, like a black smoke, rolls up Revenge!

[*Drum roll heard.*

[*Enter, on the balcony of the Town Hall,* ARTHUR DIMMESDALE, *with his senior colleague,* REV. JOHN WILSON; GOV. BELLINGHAM *and other dignitaries, attended by four sergeants.*

Wilson. Hester Prynne, hearken!
Thy husband absent,
Far beyond sea—
A child to thee here was born,
Bringing disgrace and scorn.
Heaven's wise decree
Hath taken thy daughter away,
Wafted on wings of death.
If with her thou wouldst feel
Heaven's holy breath,—
No longer thy secret conceal,
But thy fellow-offender accuse.

[*Pause.*

Hast thou no word to say?

[*Hester remains silent.*

Dost thou refuse?

[*Hester is still silent.*

[*To* HESTER, *laying his hand on* ARTHUR'S *shoulder.*
With my brother I've striven,
My colleague pastor—
This godly youth;—
That here in the face of heaven
He deal with you, touching the truth:
That no longer you hide
His name who wrought you this wrong
And led to your grievous falling.
Guilt-burdened, bow your pride
Of sin: Hear conscience calling!

Bellingham (*to* ARTHUR).

Yea, worthy sir,
You are her pastor and preacher.
Speak with her; plead—
Exhort her; beseech her.

(*To* HESTER.)

Tho' thou hast wandered,
Far from the true path straying;—
The evil is in the deed,
Not in the saying.
Therefore take heed:
Confess! Confess!
And the powers of heaven may bless
Your late relenting.

(*To* ARTHUR.)

But you, O gentle brother,
Alone can prove
If she have grace for repenting;
This hapless mother,—
Lost wife beguiled
By alien love,—
Whom fate holds far from her husband,
And death despoils of her child.

Chorus. Yea, worthy one, deal with this woman's soul.

Arthur. Thou hearest them, Hester Prynne,
And, alas, thou seest
The maze of grief wherein
I walk, the least
Of those who dare sinners upbraid.
Thy welfare was in my keeping;
And so thy sin must be mine.
Fully *thou* hadst faith in thy guide:
All the more, therefore,
Imploring—yea, weeping—
My prayer must ascend for pardon.
Why, then, dost thou make no sign?
Nay, think; if thy lips thou harden,
Then I,—for thy poor soul's sake
That I so care for,
And even death would dare for—
Thy burden of silence upon me take.

Chorus. O wise and child-like,
Simple and pure ;—
With words of an angel he speaks !

Arthur (*to* HESTER).
Not so ; but of one who seeks
To save thee from dole.
If peace to thee it would give,
And thy spirit make whole,
Or hope of salvation insure,—
Tell his name who with thee now suffers,
Though hiding his guilty heart.
High or low, spare him not from the ban.
Be not too tender,
Nor pity render
To him who, so, may be tempted
To play the dissembler's part.
Remember, he is not exempted
From the doom that shadows thee.
Think, ere thou repliest ;
For if the truth thou deniest,
O Hester, Hester ! —
His soul with thine condemned may be.

[ARTHUR *sinks back, exhausted, with hand over heart.* BELLINGHAM *and* WILSON, *anxious, support him.*

Chorus. Look, look ! He reels
And trembles. Too sharp the stress
Of grief that he feels
For the wanton's woe.
Though fallen low,
Base woman, thou shouldst be proud
Of the wretchedness
His pity deigns to bless.
Answer him, aloud.

Arthur (*rousing himself to fresh effort*).
Ay. Tell them who tempted thee.

Hester (*gently*). From me the world shall never know his name.

Wilson. Confession and repentance may avail
To take the scarlet letter off thy breast.

Hester (*looking at* ARTHUR).
It is too deeply branded.
Ye cannot take it off !

Arthur. Speak out the name :

Chorus. Speak, speak !

Chill. (*from crowd*). Ay, woman ; speak,
And give thy child a father !

Hester (*startled and agitated*). Ha ; that voice—
No, no ; thrice no, to thee ! My child hath found
A heavenly father. Ye shall never know
Its earthly one.

ENSEMBLE.

ARTHUR, CHILLINGWORTH, BELLINGHAM, WILSON, HESTER, CHORUS.

Arthur. O marvel ! She will not speak.
O wondrous kindness of a woman's heart !
Reproach to my soul,
And agony deep !
For while I keep
My secret apart,
She, alas, undefended,
This open scorn
Alone must endure.
Maddening silence,
Torture accurst,
That burns the soul
Like lips athirst
Where hell-fires roll :
Ah, would the torture were ended !
Yet, ah, though humbly
I here were to kneel,
My guilt to unfold,—
Fair fame and falsehood spurning—
Too late for her weal
The truth would be told :
For the flowering dawn
Of her womanhood pure
Is lost in the hot noon's burning.

Chill. Then, if she will not speak,
Hell close her lips, but open her heart to me
He who has betrayed
My sacred trust,

To me shall atone.
Ay; vengeance is just,
And in vain all concealing.
The traitor unknown
At my feet shall be laid,
Himself to me revealing.
But thou, who hast broken
Thy vow in disgrace,—
May the governor spare thee!
For thee I would rule
By thy shattered heart
And truth forsworn.
Till I ensnare thee,
And make thee mourn
Thine evil part,
And his, poor fool,—
With double woe contending.

Chorus.

She will not speak:
O devil-bound spirit!
What! here among us
Shall we then cherish
Satan's own seed?
Nay, from the land let her perish!
Ay; give her death!
Worshipful governor,
Dally not long
With her stubborn wrong,
Who shows no repentance;
But swift unto death
Give thou her sentence!
To death!
Hearken, all hearken!
What may he declare,—
Our ruler undaunted?
The doom in his face
By compassion is haunted:
Would he grant her a grace,
And will he so dare?
Nay, then, we demand
That the woman, banned
By law, shall have death,—
The wage of her dark offending!

Wilson. She will not speak :
'Tis death within her soul that makes her dumb.
Yet not in vain
May pity seek
To wake again
The soul from trance,
Its slumber imbuing
With eager breath.
Let mercy be ours,—
Her life renewing.
O powers of heaven,
Give judgment wise
To thy servants here,—
That we to this woman
Your will may truly make known !
Let your light on us rise,
And your glory appear
In the words of the just ;—
Or be it with death or life she atone.

Hester. Maddening silence,
Torture accurst,
That burns the soul
Like lips athirst
Where hell-fires roll !
Almighty Father,
End thou this woe !
Whatever doom to me shall come,
Spare not my sin ;
But lay me low,
Despised, accurst ;
And save him, first,—
That he may win
The boon of thy pardon descending !
To guard his honor
He, too, must be dumb ;
But alas for the grief
In his bosom pent as a prison !
May mercy, like rain
On the withering leaf,
His spirit renew,
Till his life upspring,
As a flower when dawn has arisen.

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Bellingham. Tho' we slay her, still lives the father
We vainly have sought.
Young, fair, of her husband forsaken,—
So was her honor shaken,
Her ruin wrought.
Defiant, unbending,
She will not speak?
Yet loth am I to array,
The law's last power to say,
Her life shall now have ending.
I dare not condemn her!
For may it not be
That slow, sad time
And penance profound
Her heart will subdue?—
Till the truth of her prime
She seek to renew?
Hear, then! I decree
Not death. She is free——

(*End of Ensemble.*)

Chorus. She is free!

Bellingham. But henceforth apart
From other folk she must tarry;
And there on her heart,
Her life long, carry
Yon Scarlet Letter!

[HESTER *clutches at her bosom convulsively, and bows her head.*

Chorus (*mocking her*). The scarlet woman
And Scarlet Letter!
What retribution better!
Ha, ha! Ha, ha!
All her life hereafter
Round her shall ring scorn and laughter.

Bellingham (*to* WILSON). Now, worthy minister,
For prayer and sermon!
Pour on the multitude
The dew of Hermon—
Thy balmy eloquence;—
That in union we dwell together.

[*To the crowd.*

Into the church,
Good people, repair.

[WILSON *and the others enter the Meeting House. As* ARTHUR *passes the Pillory his glance meets* HESTER'S. *He turns away with bowed head, his hand clutching his breast, and hurriedly enters the Meeting House.* HESTER *remains standing on the Pillory, and* CHILLINGWORTH *lingers near her.*

Hester. My heart is broken.
O shame and sorrow!
How shall I face the morrow,—
Wearing this token?

[*Sinks down, fainting.*

Chill. (*rushing up Pillory steps*).
What has chanced here?
She must not die.
Now, necromancy,
Come to my aid!

[*He mixes a potion in a leathern cup, which, with case bottles, he takes from his girdle; and pours the draught within her lips.*

Hester (*partly recovering*).
To mine anguish leave me:—
I am not afraid
To perish alone!

Chill. Nay, look. It is I.
Dost thou not know me?

Hester (*starting up*). Thou! Thou?—
Roger Prynne, of the darkling brow!
Whence comest thou here?

Chill. Hush, Hester. Have no fear.

Hester (*trying to conceal the Scarlet Letter*).
But if thou know'st—

Chill. The worst I know!

[*A pause.*

Far over ocean straying
Thee still—tho' long delaying—
I came to find.
But, lo, the unfaithful sea,
Wrecking us, cast me ashore

On a wild coast:
Whence, wandering long,
Through the silent forest,
Thee still to find, I came;—
Till here in the market-place
I beheld thy face
And thine open shame—
My wife!

Hester, (*in agony growing faint again*).

Oh! I can bear no more!

[*She droops, and is supported by* CHILL.

CHORAL.

(*Heard within the church.*)

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below!
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Chill. (*proffering cup anew*).

Drink this. Be strong.

Hester.

Will it bring me death?
Then gladly I drink it,
To win release.

[CHILL. *presses the cup upon her, and she drains it.*

Chill. (*after she has drunk*).

No; it gives thee life,
And keeps thee living,
That so thine infamy's mark
Still may burn on thy bosom.

Hester.

O pitiless, thou! and strange
The charm thy potion has wrought;
As though all my thought
Were artfully lulled, by thy soothing,
To some dark spell.

Chill.

Yea;—never to tell
Thy secret, save to me.
I ask not wherefore
Nor how you fell.

Since, from my birth deformed—
The fault was mine
To dream you loved me.

(*Choral ends.*)

Hester. Love I felt not, nor feigned.

Chill. Yet thou hast wronged me,
And the man still is living
Who wronged us both.
For him there can be no forgiving.
Speak, Hester. Who is he?

Hester. Nay, ask me not! No power
Can wring from me his name.

Chill. As in books I've sought truth,
Or, in alchemy, gold;
Him I'll hunt without ruth
Till his secret I hold.

Hester (*shuddering*). And then—you would kill?

Chill. Nay. Let the man live!
I obey heaven's will.

Hester. If its mercy should give
That in honor he bide?

Chill. Like a star let him shine!
Yet, wherever he hide,
He is mine! He is mine!

Hester. Thy deeds feign mercy,—but thy words are terror.

Chill. Thou'st kept the mystery of thy paramour;
One thing I ask: that thou keep, also, mine.
None know me in this land; yet here's my home,
Near thee—near him. But thou—betray me not!

Hester. Why dost thou lay upon me this command?

Chill. Thy husband, to the world, is as one dead:
Henceforth the name of "Chillingworth" I wear.
Thou, recognize me not by word or sign,
Nor breathe our secret to the man thou knowest;
For if thou dost, his fame, his life will be
Mine to destroy. Hester, beware! beware!

Hester. I will be secret, then, for thee—for him.

Chill. (*smiles grimly*).
Ay; dwell in darkness, ever.

Hester. How strange thy smile!
Oh! art thou like the Black Man of the forest?
Hast thou enticed my soul into a bond
Of ruin?

Chill. Thy soul, Hester? No; not thine!

(*Choral begins again within Church.*)

"God's voice breaks cedars; yea, God breaks cedars of Lebanus."

[*Tumult and cries heard within church. The people troop forth in confusion, excited, with* BELLINGHAM, *etc. Some of them carry* ARTHUR *in their arms.*

Chorus. He has fainted. Air!
Help, help for our saintly pastor!

Hester. Arthur! Arthur!
How ghostly pale!

[*She runs to him swiftly; drops on her knees by him, anxious. The crowd angrily drive her away.*

Chorus. Back, woman! Thy touch
To his white soul is pollution.

Chill. 'Tis he. O wonder of darkness,—
I have found the man!

[CURTAIN.]

ACT II.

The Forest. HESTER'S *Hut, on one side. At back an opening among the trees, showing a forest path lost in obscurity. Sunlight alternates with deep shadow. Indications of a brook among the trees; the light sparkling on it fitfully.*

Enter HESTER *from the Hut.*

Hester.

Ripple of the brook, and rest of the sunshine
Asleep under trees :—
Restless am I as the water's murmur
And wandering breeze.
Sunlight flies from me ere I near it :—
The brook's moan stays !
Grief never dies from me ; still I hear it,
Through nights and days,
Sob 'mid the woodland—the stream intoning
My heart's own woe.
Ah, sad brooklet, why still art moaning ?
What dost thou know ?
Is it a secret of this dark forest
Told unto thee ;—
Fearsomely wrong, that thou abhorrest,
And so must flee,
Whispering ever the hapless tidings ?
Couldst thou but cease ;—
Hushing thy plaint, with my spirit's chidings ;—
I should find peace !

[HESTER *sinks down upon a mossy bank by the brook, musing. A pause, the music continuing.*

Hester.

Ah, still how gently,
Blending, returning,
With long endeavor—
Fleeting as foam,

Yet enduring forever—
Sweet thoughts of home
Awake in me yearning!
And still my heart doth wander
Far to its childhood blest
In England yonder.
O, innocence! flown like a bird from the storm-blown nest—
Come back to me!
Dreams of the church-bell, and prayers that I knew—
Come true, come true!

[*She kneels.*

O Father in heaven! if still
To call thee Father I dare:—
Grant me to do thy will;
My burden here to bear!
Unto my heart restore
Sweet faith again, and rest,
That humbly I once more
May trust my soul to thy care.

[*After a pause there is heard in the distance a madrigal sung by new Pilgrims, from England, who gradually draw nearer.*

MADRIGAL (*of the new Pilgrims*).

Green are the meads
Made new by showers,
And hedgerows white
With hawthorn flowers
Win our hearts to delight.
Who'd then at home be staying?
Up; cast aside dull sorrow's weeds:
'Tis time we go a-Maying.

To the daisy's breast
The larks, above us,
Rain down heaven's song:—
"Oh listen, and love us!"
And all the day long
Among the daisies playing,
We remember their strain, a dream of the blest!
For so we go a-Maying.

Hester. Hark! How those voices
Make answer to my longing
With song well known to me of yore,
That now, returning, my spirit rejoices,
And brings dear memories thronging
Back from the days of old!

Enter a band of Pilgrims, with women, children, etc.

[HESTER *advances, hesitating, towards the group, as though to welcome them.*

Two Puritan Men (*accompanying the Pilgrims as guides*).
Nay; hold her aloof.
A witch she is,
And wanton, too;—
An outcast soul.
Beware!

[*The Pilgrims draw away from* HESTER *in dread and scorn.* HESTER, *suddenly remembering, shrinks, clutching the Scarlet Letter. The others continue to move away.*

Hester (*alone*). O Ruler of heaven!
Are these thy creatures?
Can it be, Thou hast given
To men thy features—
With hearts of clay
And lips of flame,
To blacken thine image
And a soul to blast in Thy name?
Ah, then farewell
To meek repentance:
No longer I dwell
In mercy's bound.
Lord, give them sentence
Of anguish profound!—
As I, too, fling them my curse,
Like a brand from the fire of my bosom.
May it burn and wither
Their wandering souls,
Hither and thither;—
Cling to them, haunting,
And humble their vaunting,

To crumble in ashes
Of endless death!

[*Goes into her hut, with a gesture of despair.*

The scene darkens, as though with a passing Cloud.

Enter CHILLINGWORTH *and* GOVERNOR BELLINGHAM.

Bellingham. What cry was that?

Chill. The wildwood, sighing.

Bell. Nay, rather the wail
Of human sorrow undying.

Chill. Portents prevail
In this favored land,
Where only a barrier frail
Between spirit and flesh may stand.
Belike you heard
Some evil bird,
Or the shriek of a dark soul winging
Its way to the nether world.

Bell. Most learned leech,
Thou art so skilled
In nature-speech,
With marvel filled,—
Tell me, canst thou yet reach
The source of wasting woe
That, with agony slow,
Consumes the life
Of Arthur, our friend?

Chill. A strife without end!
The ancient mystery
Of body and mind.
Hidden and strange the history!

Bell. Much do I fear,—
So great his worth,
So tender his spirit and pure,—
Not long he will endure
These bonds of earth,
But, leaving us lonely,
Take flight to heaven.

Chill. To heaven? No, no!
Of such disaster be sure
There need be no dread.
I would not grieve thee,—
With thoughts of woe.
Arthur I guard, as the night guards a flower
From the sun strong-rayed.
If the blossom shall flourish
Or fail and fade,—
Not well may I know.

Bell. Thou knowest him dear to us:
Save him; oh, save!
Hold him still near to us,
Far from the grave.

Chill. Deep within me I nourish
Desire that he live.
And ere he should perish,
My soul to perdition I'd give.

Bell. Thou lovest him well.

[*Exit Bellingham.*

Chill. (*alone*). Ay, indeed—with the love of hell!
With such love here I await
The holy man.
Why does he linger afar, so late?
To yonder lonely mission he fared
Of Eliot, our Indian apostle.
Ha! can it be he has fancied or dared
My grasp to elude?
In vain were the plan!
For his life is pursued
By the silent foot-fall, still, of my hate.
Round him is woven the web of his fate,
While I, ever near,
As leech and friend,
Have watched the quivering wounds of his soul.
My skill alone has kept him whole;
That over him, so, I might gloat, to the end.
No, no; he shall not die!
As music his cries of pain
Ring sweet through my brain;
And I live by my joy in his agony.
He shall have life,—

Long life of restless days,
And nights of endless woe !

Enter, from the forest. ARTHUR.

Arthur (*startled*). What ! Is it thou—
My kind physician ?

Chill. Yea, Arthur ; waiting ;
For even now
Methought thou wouldst return.

Arthur. Good friend, I feel
Thy kindly will ;
Yet sometimes, weary, the soul
Must wander still,
With only God for its goal.

Chill. Yet in thy weakness
'Tis best thou lean on me,
And yield with meekness ;
For a grief at the spirit's core,
Like smouldering flame,
Will set its mark
On the outward frame.
Wouldst have me heal
Thy bodily woe ?—
Lay open the dark,
Deep trouble or wound in the soul below.

Arthur. No, no ;—to thee ? No ;
Nor to any physician of earth !
For a soul's disease
To the healer of souls
I go ; since He, as Him it may please,
Can kill or can cure.
But who art thou,
With daring so sure
Thyself to thrust
'Twixt the sufferer's dearth
And the bounty supreme, all-wise. of his God ?

Chill. Nay ; I but told you
That which I must.
Be patient ; and heed ;
Thy strength guard well.
Election sermon to-morrow thou preachest.

Thy mind must be calm,
To weigh what thou teachest,
And minister balm
To thy reverent flock
Who bow before thee
And truly adore thee—
Their shepherd, their saint and sheltering rock.
Too well thy tender pity I know.
Thy heart still bleeds for another's woe,
And is ever oppressed
With the sorrow of her whose wrong is confessed.

Arthur. Ha! Thou meanest——

Chill. Hester Prynne!

[ARTHUR, *greatly agitated, seems about to remonstrate, or deny; but* CHILLINGWORTH *continues.*

Nay; dare not protest:
Thou shalt not deny!
Turmoil of soul above all must thou dread;
For it saps thy force, and deepens disease.
So good I know thee, so saintly kind,—
For this poor woman thou long hast repined.
And so have I!
But now, instead,
Calm thy compassion! Canst not appease
Her conscience with thy sympathy?

[*Indicating* HESTER'S *hut.*

Lo, here she dwells:
And, now we are nigh,
Wilt thou not see her?

Arthur (*excited, amazed*).
I?—Thou forgetest—
How may it be,
Since here, condemned, she dwells apart?

Chill. Thou art her pastor. Thou hast the right
To see her, talk with her—heart to heart.

Arthur. Dost thou think that *I*, then——

Chill. Yea; thou of all men:
Thy heart is so pure.
Ah, go to her. Go!

Arthur. And thou!—Dost thou wait near?

Chill. Nay; homeward I fare:
These herbs I now must distill.

Arthur (*gives token of relief; aside*).
At last! At last!

Chill (*aside*).
Now let her deal with the man as she will,
And the black flower blossom as it may!

Arthur (*to* CHILL.).
For a time, farewell.

Chill. I go. (*Aside.*) Fare ill!

[*Exit* CHILLINGWORTH.

Arthur (*alone*). So long it seems—long years!—
I have dwelt amid darkness and tears,
In the bonds of sin:
While evil has gnawed at my life, without,
And remorse has drained it, within.
And long, ah, long since I knew
The touch of a happiness true,
Or words without fear!
Would God I might break the chains of doubt,
And call to thee, Hester! Hester!

[*Turns away; sinking down on the moss.*

Enter HESTER, *from hut.*

Hester. Thou, Arthur,—here?

Arthur. Who speaks?

Hester. 'Tis I.

Arthur. Thou, truly, Hester,—here in life?

Hester. Know'st thou me not; so long the time
'Twixt then and now?

Arthur I know thee well, but long is the time
'Twixt then and now,—
Since our hidden joy was in its prime;
For grief sets age upon my brow.
And thou; ah, thou,—
Hast thou found peace?

Hester (*pausing, shakes head and makes a gesture*).
Alas!—Or thou release?

Arthur. Nay; naught but despair!
What else could be mine,

Since, tho' I wander whithersoe'er,
My life is wrapt in dark deceit?

Hester. Yet still thy people reverence thee.

Arthur. Hence the greater my misery:
For Satan laughs, while my people praise.
Happy art thou, who bearest
On thy breast the Scarlet Letter.

Hester. Happy!—what dost thou say?

Arthur Ah, better, far better
To wear that raiment,
Than life-long lurk in deceit.
Woe unto me!—
My letter in secret still doth burn
With a pain that never and never dies;
As though I stood at the judgment-seat,
Nor offered even confession's payment;
While, from the throne above,
Like trumpet-blasts,
I hear the accusing voice:—
"Thou, consecrate and placed
O'er men, to teach them purity,
False art thou to thy trust!
Thy calling hast thou disgraced.
Soiled are thy robes, and thou
Liest low in the dust;
A withered bough,
That God into flame unending casts!"
Had I but one friend,
Or a foe—the worst—
To whom I might bend
Each day, and be known as a sinner vile,—
E'en so much truth might reconcile
My soul to life. But, now, each breath
Is falsehood, emptiness—death!

Hester. Such a friend thou hast—
Behold!—in me,
O'er the bitter present, the vanished past
Of thy sin and mine,
To weep, with thee.

Arthur. Ay! Friend so true,
Forgiving and tender,—
Could charity human

The wrong undo,
Then were I saved by the faith of a woman
Thro' pitying tears of rainbow splendor.

Hester. Alas, not only a friend
Serves thy behoof :
There dwells with thee under thy roof
The enemy thou dost desire ;
A foe accursed !

Arthur. What mean'st thou ? That man ; —
Gray Chillingworth ?
Thou sayest that he
My soul's deep may scan ?
Long since I felt his presence was hate,
And the grasp of his hand the clutch of fate.
But, since thou dost know,
Tell me :—why is he my foe ?

Hester. Know, then, the truth till now from thee hid :
This man of dread
Who now doth hold us both appalled—
He, Arthur, was my husband !

Arthur. Thy husband ? O hideous thought,
Beyond belief !
Woman, what wrong hast thou wrought,—
My soul to lay bare
With its anguish of sin,
That he, like a hawk of the air,
Might pierce within,
And the secret black from my bosom tear ?
Thou hast struck me a blow
None else might dare ;
And hast laid me low
In the dust at his feet.
Where now shall I turn,—
By mine enemy pent ?
No refuge, now, for my soul's distress,
Save the tangle deep of the wilderness
Wherein to hide.

[*Pause.*

Or else—ah, see !

[*Takes out a phial from within his vestments.*

Hester, herein I hold a key
To the prisoning earth.

Wide it would open the gate
To a life beyond :
For cunningly Chillingworth
This poison distilled
From herbs that give death.
Who knows if God willed,—
Or hell-born hate—
That I the potion found ?
'Tis mine ; and be it a foe or friend,
If its lips touch mine, my woe will end.

Hester (*seizes the poison-phial from him*).
No, no. It is not thine !
If freedom come,
It shall be from my lips,—
Not those of death, that strike thee dumb.
Why here abide ?
Is the world not wide ?
Nay ; bend thy steps to the path of the sea !
It bore thee hither, and so again
May carry thee hence, to make thee free.

Arthur. I *cannot* go ! No strength have I
To battle longer ;
Far, far from thee
To toil and strive new life to find.
The endless pain
Of sin unspoken my steps would track,
And fling me prone.
Ah, think !—in distant lands to wander ;
Exiled, unknown
To die !

Hester (*softly*). Thou shalt not go alone !

Arthur. Hester !

Hester. With thee I go ! We look not back,
But forth with brave endeavor.
To thee my strength I lend :
My arm will shelter, my love enfold thee.
No siren of death from me can withhold thee.
Let our hearts take wing—
As here the symbol of wrong I fling
From my breast forever !

[*Tearing off the Scarlet Letter, she throws it far from her. The white hood, dropping from her head, lets her hair fall loose.*

Strong are we and young :
Ay ; thou art so, my friend.
And dost thou not still find in me
The beauty once to thee so dear ?

Arthur. O Hester ! the glow
Of thy love my love of life renews.
Thy blood beats warm :
With thee I brave the storm !
At last we are free :
The cloud of sorrow fades far behind us,
And never the mist of the future shall blind us.

Hester. Ay ; the past is gone !
We look to the coming years ;
Since grief is done with, and dawn
Makes joy of our midnight fears.

Arthur. Thro' the forest the sunshine breaks,
In a flood of radiance rolled ;
And within us the splendor awakes
Of happiness yet untold.
Ah, Hester, the golden ray
Of hope shines bright in thine eyes.

Hester. Lo, the wings of a ship in the bay
Wait but for the winds to arise,
And waft us, with blessing divine,
Far from this land of death.

Arthur. O love ! each tone of thine
To me is heaven's breath !

Hester and Arthur.
Quick, let us haste
From the desert waste
And lingering shadows of olden sorrow,
To follow the star of a golden morrow !
The white sail gleams
With a light of dreams ;
It beckons us on with gladdening hope,
No more in anguish dark to grope.
To a land of new life
The ship's prow speeds ;
Nor omens drear in its flight it heeds :
For grief is but foam in the sharp keel's furrow—
Quick, then, escape ! Nor cast
One glance at the stormy past !

[CURTAIN.]

ACT III.

The Market-Place, as in Act I, with view of harbor at back. A crowd of Puritan men and women, intermingled with men from forest settlements. Sailors interspersed among crowd. CHILLINGWORTH *is seen at one side, conferring closely with the Bristol Shipmaster. A crowd of English Pilgrims, just arriving at the Market-Place. During their song* CHILLINGWORTH *leaves the Shipmaster and disappears in the crowd.*

GLEE.

The new Pilgrims. From loud winds blowing,
And ocean spray,
We come to the seed-time sowing
Of Massachusetts Bay.
Then ho, to the New World, greeting;
And a hey for the pilgrim, hey!

With hope for the morrow
And every day;
Or be it for gladness or sorrow,
In New England we will stay,—
Each true man with his sweeting,—
And the law of the land obey!

Shipmaster (*crossing stage*). But as for me—
To the ancient island lies my way,
However wild the waves may be.
I, in sooth, myself am wild;
And yet, a faithful child,
Dear mother England I long to see.

The new Pilgrims. With a heigh for the Pilgrim, hey!

[*Music of Procession heard in distance. The crowd surges off to one side, looking for the pageant to approach.*

Chorus (*behind the scenes*). Hark ! They are coming
In stately array.
Hear the music proud, the roll of the drumming.
Cheer, now, cheer for Election day.
The minister true and the new magistrate
Once more will ope to us liberty's gate,
And close it against all hardy sin.
Thank heaven we stand the gate within !

Enter HESTER.

[*Those of the people who are nearest her, shrink away.*

CHORUS.

Puritans. The sign of thy sin
A magic circle has drawn around thee ;
Scorn ever shall hound thee :
Away ; away !

[*They leave the stage.*

Hester. Alone ? ay, gladly;
For not, as once, an outcast prone
I lie at your feet.
My freedom I greet,
And move apart—no longer sadly !
No longer to you a bond-slave I moan,
Nor dark spells now my soul defile.
On the Scarlet Letter look your last !
For, yet a little while,
Your tyrant sway is past.
Tho' now I must yield,
There in the forest vast
The blight from my bosom I cast :
If here I endure it again,
To triumph is turned this outward stain—
On the joy, that throbs within me, sealed.
Soon, soon beyond your reach,
Harsh people merciless,
I fly to the whispering tide
And the loved one's caress.
Yon dark mysterious sea will hide
My wrong and my happiness
From your evil speech !

[*To the Shipmaster, who has come near her.*

God greet thee ! All is well ?

Shipmaster. Ay, mistress; if I dare say so!
I have it on truth of a witch's word;
And witches, I've heard,
Know darkness from light.
Our barque is ready:
At anchor she rides
For a turn of the tides:
And, wind holding steady,
We sail to-night.
Good omen I deem it,
And company rare,
That you, sweet lady,
With us will fare.

Hester. Dost thou not know
The best of omens thou canst hope
Will be his presence who goes with me?

Shipmaster. Is it truly so?
Then darkly I grope.
Didst thou not say he flies in fear
Of hurt from the Puritan Fathers here?
If wrong he has wrought,
How can his presence with blessing be fraught?
Still—the better, say I, if saint he be!
Since thou spokest, last night,
Of passage flight,
Yon old leech came to seek a berth.
He, too, it seems, would cross the earth.
If saint and doctor together go,
Fair winds indeed must blow.

Hester (*aside*). Ah, worse than death those words presage!
[*To Shipmaster*
Yon leech! What mean you?

Shipmaster. Why, he—the old chirurgeon mage:
Know you not?—Chillingworth.

Hester. Then he, too, has seen you?
Dost tell me now, that he will sail
With us on your ship?

Shipmaster. Ay; with a favoring gale
And gladsome weather,
To these bitter folk we'll give the slip.
Is it not well done?

He,—the hump-shouldered one—
Long has he known your friend:
They've dwelt together.
The leech will cling to him unto the end.

[*He leaves her and mingles with the crowd.*

Hester. Lost, lost, then. All is lost!
Nor in this New World solitude,
Or amid-sea tossed,
Can we the black enchantment elude!

[*She perceives* CHILLINGWORTH *at the opposite side of the market-place, smiling at her with vindictive meaning.*

O devil-face and mocking smile!
Where watchful malice ever lurks!—
What serpent in that heart of guile
So sombre dwells and slyly works,—
Sharp gleaming on me from his eyes?
Our plot he unriddles; our hope forestalls,
With craft unknown.
Closer he holds us than prison-walls:
Hate is harder than stone.
Ah, if unto Arthur
One word of warning
I might but speak!
Yet, alas, 'mid the multitude scorning,
The sole one who loves me I dare not seek.
Help, help! Will God not find us,
'Mid the snares of hell that bind us?

[*Music of procession heard nearer.*

Chill. (*on opposite side of market-place*).

In vain the wile
Of flight or turning;
And wasted all her woeful cries!
For unto my hate, like incense burning,
Her flame of agony still doth rise.
The last word is spoken;
Her last hope broken;
Her with her lover henceforth I hold
In the mesh of my net.
They shall render me yet

A heavier price of their wrong, than gold.
And what can their anguish weigh
'Gainst the hurt to my hidden pride?
Or go they or stay,
My vengeance they still must abide,
And in torture burn;—
For all entreating of pity I spurn.

Chorus (*behind the scenes*).

How gayly they play!
They know the tune for Election Day.

[*Enter Band of Musicians, from one side, followed by the populace.*

Chorus. The Company Ancient
Of Honored Artillery!

[*Enter escort of Citizen Soldiers—the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company—in burnished steel, with gay plumes nodding over their morions.*

Chorus And the magistrates! Lo,
They come with fitting footsteps slow.

Enter BELLINGHAM.

Chorus. Thou who wast governor,—
Praised be thy skill!
But now we greet our new ruler,
The choice of the people's will.
Beat loud the drums!
John Endicott comes.
Endicott! Endicott!—
Governor elect!

[*Enter, during this chorus,* GOVERNOR JOHN ENDICOTT, *accompanied by other dignitaries, and bows to the crowd, right and left.* BELLINGHAM, ENDICOTT *and the others arrange themselves near Church, at back.*

Chorus. Behold our pastor—
Dear Master Arthur.
And yet his face—how pale!
A shadow sable
Draws round him as he advances.

Nay : these are fancies ;
For see how firm, erect
He steps,—as though some purpose high
His weakness were sustaining.
God-given impulse only, past all fear,
Could guide his forces frail
To bring us here
His treasure of teaching,
And bounteous preaching—
Sweet thoughts upon us raining.
Welcome, our pastor : hail—
Our hope that cannot fail !

[*Enter* ARTHUR, *with* WILSON.

BELLINGHAM, ENDICOTT *and the others wait for* ARTHUR *to approach the Church, through the lane which they have formed.*

ARTHUR, *standing erect, yet apparently weak physically, pauses. Then, instead of going towards the Church, he turns ; crosses the stage slowly, and beckons to* HESTER.

Arthur. Hester, come hither :
My Hester——come !

[HESTER, *who till now has remained where she was, half crouching in despair, draws herself up and moves towards him slowly, as if spell-bound.*

Chill. (*starting forth from the crowd*).
Hold, madman ! Hold !
What dreams distraught
Your senses benumb !
Wave back that woman !
I yet can save you :
All shall be well.

Arthur. Ha, tempter appalling,
Thou art too late !
Thy power no longer
My life controls :
A spirit stronger
Than thine quells thy hate.
God is mighty above us. The soul of souls
My will at last sets free from thine :
I shall escape thee now !

Chorus. What trouble does Satan for us design ?
Some phantasy strange, pursuing
The blameless mind, his reason has shaken !

Arthur. Come, Hester Prynne,
Thou who knowest my sin ;
Ay, Hester, come in His name,
So terrible, yet in mercy so mild,
Who has granted me grace
At the final hour to proclaim
My wickedness here, and face to face,
The evil so long within bemoaned,
But never owned,
Aloud to speak.
Thy offered strength around me twine ;
But let it obey the will divine !
Ah, Hester, I need thee ;
For stricken, weary and weak,
Now at the end,
Tho' it be but with steps of a little child,—
Yon scaffold with thee will I ascend.

[*He points to the Pillory, taking* HESTER'S *hand. The People murmur, but are dazed, and dare not interpose, as* ARTHUR *and* HESTER *move towards the Pillory, and mount it.* CHILLINGWORTH *follows them to the steps.*

Bellingham. Some witchcraft, I fear,
Or spirit impure,
His mind doth deceive.
Thou, Father Wilson,
The devil adjure
That in peace our Arthur he leave.

Wilson. Arthur, Arthur, this magic forsake :
To thy true self awake !

Arthur (*standing with* HESTER *on Pillory*).
O people of New England !
Ye still who love me,
And holy have deemed me !
Your pastor behold,
Not as you long have dreamed me,
But, as heaven shines high above me,—

So of all sinners the lowest.
Thou shalt reap as thou sowest !
From falsehood's seed
I garner disgrace :
But, lo, I uproot the shriveled weed,
And the flower of truth blooms here, in its place !
The Scarlet Letter that Hester wears—
Ye have shuddered at, long :
But its lurid ray
Was but as a shadow of that fierce fire
Of smothered wrong
That, night and day,
With flaming despairs
My breast has scarred, and branded my soul !
Her fellow in sin, I have won my desire
And reached my goal ;
For I stand now beside her,
The debt of my guilt's confession to pay,
So long denied her.
If any here still
God's judgment deny,
Here now ere I die
Let them witness his will
In the blood-red mark revealed on my breast :
The Scarlet Letter—behold !

[*Tears away the ministerial band from before his breast, and sinks backward, supported by Hester.*

Chorus. O wonder ! Weird and awful sign !
Saw you the living token
Baleful blazing, over his heart
Tracing its fearful sanguine line ?
If truth he has spoken—
Ah, pity accord !
Arthur we praised,
And Hester abhorred :
So far we kept them in thought apart :
Yet now, amazed,
Together we see them brought,
In the chain of justice God hath wrought.

Chill. (*crouching in despair on the Pillory steps*).

Thou hast escaped me !
Hadst thou sought the whole world over,
No place or high or lowly
Couldst thou have found
Wherein to baffle me wholly,—
Save this mean scaffold's bound !

Hester. O Arthur, look not afar from me !
Here close am I, and my love replies
To the light of thine eyes.
Turn thou not away !
Ah, whither, then, does thy spirit stray ?

Arthur. To the land of the fountain unending
Of peace my soul is wending,
Where sorrow ne'er draws breath.
Ay, far to wander we planned,
Dear Hester—thou and I—
To a foreign strand.
But now I voyage beyond the sky—
To that home I seek, the land
Of death !

Hester. Wait, Arthur ! Wait !
For dost thou not remember,
I told thee in the forest
Thou shalt not go alone ?

[ARTHUR *sighs, looks at her longingly, then dies.*

Ha ! Hast thou fled me,—
So swiftly gone ?
My dearest one—O soul beloved ?

[*Takes out from her bosom the poison phial.*

Thee, then, I'll follow ! The poignant draught
Brewed by our enemy's fateful craft,
Will give me release.
Thou, too, dear Arthur,
Didst from it seek freedom ;
And I sought to save thee.

AAH 1932

'Twill save me from life :
And sweet to my lips its coldness comes,
As the cool winds that blow
From mountains white forever with snow.
Thou shalt not go alone !

[*She drinks the poison and dies.*

Chorus. Hush, hush ! Their souls are fled.
Peace unto the dead !
The flower of sacrifice
Blooms in no earthly garden.
Thou, Hester, over us triumph hast won ;
Towards mercy turning our sullen hate.
Thou, Arthur, though repenting late,—
May God thee pardon !

[End of the Scarlet Letter.]

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